



Indiana State Department of Agriculture  
Governor Michael R. Pence  
Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann, Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Gina Sheets, Indiana Agriculture Director

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### **Red Gold Stewardship Award Incentivizes Sound Conservation Methods**

In the effort to promote solid conservation techniques among Ag producers, incentive-based, voluntary measures continue to be a leading method.

A very good example of this is present with the Red Gold Stewardship Award Program, a privately-funded campaign with which the Indiana State Department of Agriculture is gladly able to partner.

The goal of the program is to highlight the practices already utilized by conservation-minded growers of tomatoes, as well as spurring others to embrace such practices as part of their own farm management.

Red Gold Director of Agriculture Steve Smith said his company's commitment to conservation is reflected in the award program.

"The motivation is to foster the belief in practices of taking care of our most precious resource – the land," Smith said. "The decision to start the program revolved around our desire to be good stewards of resources."

The incentive is straightforward enough: First prize pays a \$1,000 scholarship plus the equivalent price of an extra truck load of tomatoes per day during harvest season. Second prize pays \$500 plus an extra half-load per day, with a second-chance drawing also providing an opportunity for growers to receive the price for an extra load per day.

ISDA's role in the competition is to serve as an independent evaluator, including the conducting of judging and scoring. ISDA Division of Soil Conservation Director Jordan Seger said the evaluating system serves to be a comprehensive measure.

"The award program examines a whole farm and systems approach to conservation," Seger said. "As a result, there is a strong emphasis on complete integration of stewardship of natural resources."



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ISDA Resource Specialist Julie Harrold has been part of the on-farm visiting group for the past four years. She explained that tomatoes and other specialty crops can pose specific challenges from a soil management perspective, but that the practices preached by Harrold and her ISDA colleagues are making a difference.

“Something a little different with tomatoes, which I didn’t realize when I first started, is that the producers are out every seven days spreading some kind of chemical, to fight pests or add nutrients. Being in the field that much causes concern about (soil) compaction, but working with cover crops can help with that,” she said, referring to the practice of planting crops between cash crop rotations to reduce soil runoff and nutrient loss. “When the rotation includes specialty crops it can be hard on the ground, so when they incorporate these conservation methods it really makes a difference on their farms. I’ve seen a lot of improvement since I’ve started, so it’s been fun to go out and see that.”

Red Gold, an Indiana-based company, typically contracts with more than 50 growers in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. Tomato-planting season takes place in May and early June, with harvest beginning in early August and lasting until mid-October.

All Red Gold growers are eligible. From 22 applicants, six top farms were selected for on-site visits. This year’s winners were Jason Stanton of Sherwood, MI and Gary Lott of Deerfield, MI.

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